NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGEING

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NIA Commentary on the 2021 Federal Budget

April 19, 2021

"Our elders have been this virus's principal victims. The pandemic has preyed on them mercilessly, ending thousands of lives and forcing all seniors into fearful isolation." - Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance

The Liberal government released the long-anticipated Budget 2021, their first federal budget in over two years. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Budget 2021 outlines a path towards economic and social recovery – specifically focusing on extending subsidy programs, child care, supports for older Canadians, racial justice, and a green economy.

The NIA has identified a number of key initiatives and programs in Budget 2021 focused on better enabling the health, wellbeing, and social protection of older Canadians.

Federal Budget 2021 Highlights:

1. Delivering an Apology to Canada's Seniors

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland started off the Budget 2021 address with an apology to seniors, stating "we have failed so many of those living in LTC facilities – to them – and to their families, let me say this, I am so sorry." This was the federal government acknowledging the systemic shortcomings of long-term care (LTC) in Canada that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed. The pandemic has led to over 15,000 deaths across LTC settings, or 65% of Canada's deaths to date.

2. A Pledge of $3 Billion in Additional Funding to Improve the Quality and Infrastructure of Canada's Long-Term Care Systems

ensuring standards for long-term care are applied and permanent changes are made". The NIA has been advocating for systemic changes to Canada's LTC system, through its Future of Long Term Care Reports (Report 1, Report 2, 2019) and its latest National Seniors Strategy (2020). In addition, the NIA's Director of Health Policy Research, Dr. Samir Sinha, was recently announced as the Chair of the Technical Committee that will be developing Canada's new National LTC Services Standard. These new standards and practices, set to be finalized in 2022, will apply to the services and operations of LTC across Canada. Today's funding will provide Canada's provinces and territories with the additional financial support they need to enable the adoption of Canada's new National LTC Services Standard.

3. A Pledge to Expand Old Age Security Payments

Along with its commitments to strengthen its LTC systems, Budget 2021 proposes improving the financial security of older Canadians by increasing Old Age Security (OAS) payments. Specifically, Canadians aged 75 and over (as of June 2022), who are currently receiving monthly OAS payments, will qualify for an additional one-time payment of $500 in August 2021. It also proposes introducing legislation to increase regular OAS payments for Canadians 75 years and older by 10% "on an ongoing basis" as of July 2022. This will "give seniors more financial security later in life, particularly at the time when they face increased care expenses and greater risk of running out of savings", Budget 2021 says.

4. A Pledge to Invest More to Help Older Canadians Age at Home

Budget 2021 proposes providing $90 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, for Employment and Social Development Canada to launch the Age Well at Home initiative. This initiative will support community-based organizations to enable low-income seniors to age in place. This initiative would also support regional and national projects, that help expand services, which have already demonstrated results in helping seniors stay in their homes. The NIA has made substantial contributions in advocating for enabling seniors to age in place, most notably through its recent Bringing Long-Term Care Home Report (2020) – which proposes a virtual long-term care program that allows older Canadians to continue living at home.

5. A Pledge to Help Tackle Elder Abuse

Budget 2021 also proposes to invest $50 million over five years, starting in 2021-22, for interventions that "promote safe relationships and prevent family violence, including intimate

most notably through its report, Putting an End to Ageism and Elder Abuse Once and For All (2020).

6. A Pledge to Improve Canada's Health Data Capacity and Infrastructure

Budget 2021 proposes to provide $41.3 million over six years, and $7.7 million annually, for Statistics Canada to strengthen data infrastructure and collection for health care. The NIA supports this investment and has made a significant contribution to the lack of data infrastructure through its LTC COVID-19 Outbreak Tracker. The tracker has been widely cited throughout the pandemic, most notably contributing to the recent NIA/Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) report: The Impact of COVID-19 on LTC in Canada Focus on the First 6 Months. Using NIA LTC Tracker data, this report illustrated the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on LTC residents, staff, and family members.

By Natalie Iciaszczyk, Policy Analyst, and Cameron Feil, Research Coordinator

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Caberry Weiyang Yu - Junior Research Fellow at the National Institute on Ageing, Ryerson University

Ted Rogers School of Management
Ryerson University

350 Victoria St.
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 2K3
Canada

michael.nicin@ryerson.ca

ALLEN GOSS
Academic Director
Chair of Finance and Accounting,
Ted Rogers School of Management
alg@ryerson.ca

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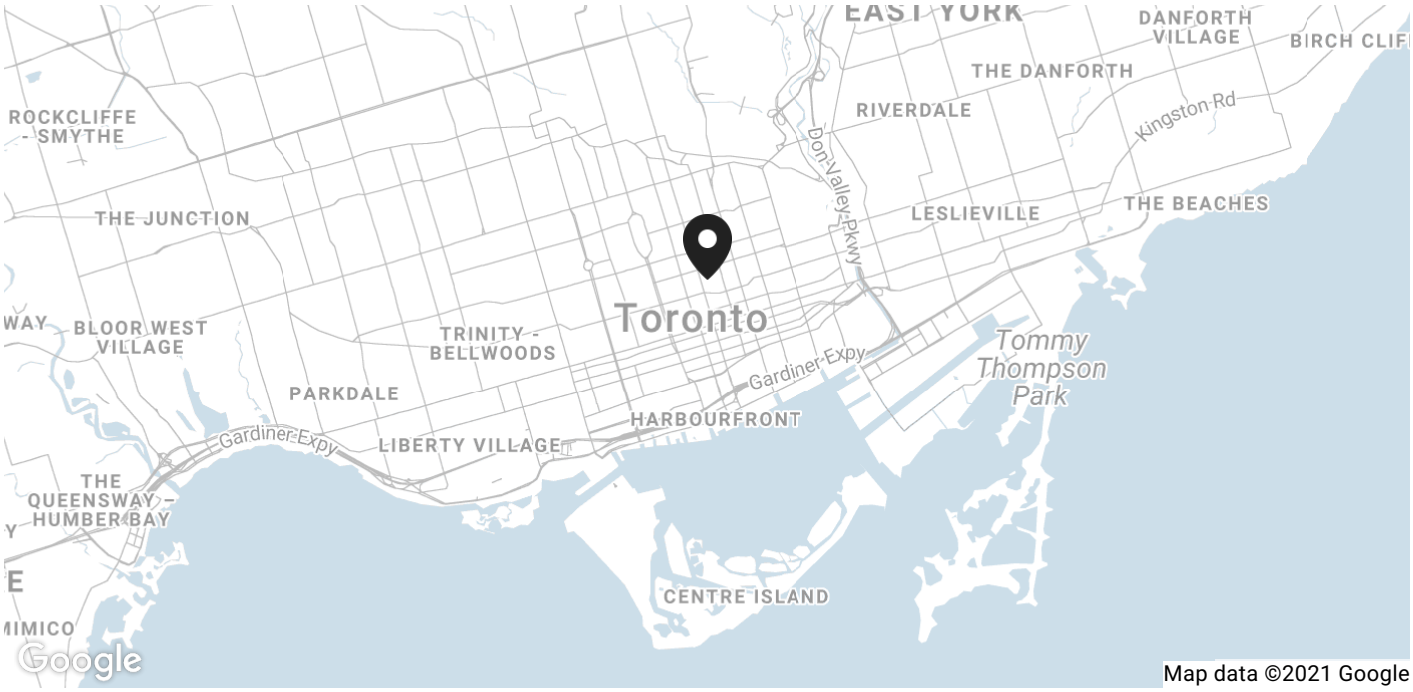
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